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ABSTRACT

This study examined preservice teachers' perceptions of characteristics of effective teachers, as well as whether these perceptions were influenced by educational beliefs (i.e., progressive versus transmissive). Data for the study were collected from 134 preservice teachers enrolled in several sections of an introductory-level education class for education majors at a large Georgia university. Students were given a questionnaire asking them to identify, rank, and define characteristics they believed excellent teachers possessed or demonstrated and a survey that identified their educational beliefs as either progressive or transmissive. A phenomenological analysis of responses revealed several characteristics that many respondents considered to reflect effective teaching. In order of endorsement level, the following seven themes emerged: student-centered; effective classroom and behavior manager; competent instructor; ethical; enthusiastic about teaching; knowledgeable about subject; and personable. Chi-square analyses revealed no relationship between the seven perception categories of effective teachers and student teachers' race, year of study, preferred grade level for teaching, and education belief. However, significantly more males than females endorsed teacher characteristics that related to being an effective classroom and behavior manager. (Contains 25 references.) (SM)

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Preservice Teachers' Perceptions of Characteristics of Effective Teachers: A Multi-Stage Mixed Methods Analysis

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to examine preservice teachers' perceptions of characteristics of effective teachers, as well as to investigate whether these perceptions are influenced by Educational beliefs (i.e., progressive vs. transmissive). Data for this study were collected from 134 preservice teachers enrolled in several sections of an introductory-level education class for education majors at a large university in South Georgia. Students were given (1) a questionnaire asking them to identify, to rank, and to define characteristics that they believe excellent teachers possess or demonstrate and (2) a published survey that identified participants' Educational beliefs as either progressive or transmissive.

A phenomenological analysis of responses revealed several characteristics that many of the preservice teachers considered to reflect effective teaching. In order of endorsement level, the following seven themes emerged from these characteristics: (1) student-centered (55.2%), (2) effective classroom and behavior manager (33.6%), (3) competent instructor (33.6%), (4) ethical (29.9%), (5) enthusiastic about teaching (23.9%), (6) knowledgeable about subject (19.4%), and (7) personable (15.7%). Using the Bonferroni adjustment, a series of chi-square analyses, revealed no relationship between the seven perception categories of effective teachers and preservice teachers' race, year of study, preferred grade level for teaching, and Educational belief. However, statistically significantly more males than did females endorsed teacher characteristics that were associated with being an effective classroom and behavior manager. Implications are discussed.

Preservice Teachers' Perceptions of Characteristics of Effective Teachers: A Multi-Stage Mixed Methods Analysis

Having students identify characteristics of effective teachers is often an early goal in teacher preparation programs. In some cases, students examine textbook definitions of effective teachers and then discuss the characteristics as exemplified by teachers in their own K-12 schooling experience. In other cases, students are asked to think about past teachers, name qualities they believe reflect effectiveness, and then examine how well the qualities they identified match textbook definitions. These textbook definitions generally describe effective teachers as knowledgeable, self-confident, and enthusiastic, with strong communication and management skills, clear instructional focus, and high expectations of self and students (e.g., Reed & Bergemann, 1992; Segall & Wilson, 1998). One need not look far into the literature to find further characteristics of effective teachers as identified through research. The following examples provide a sampling of those characteristics.

Effective teachers are profiled as having strong cognitive skills (Cotton, 1995; Demmon-Berger, 1986; ETS, 1997; Finn, 1993; Good & Brophy, 1994; Redfield & Rousseau, 1981; Rosenshine & Stevens, 1986; The National Board for Professional Teaching Standards [NBPTS], 1987; Tobin, 1987; Wortruba & Wright, 1975; Wubbles et al., 1997). They are subject specialists who are able to select, organize, and deliver content; efficient and effective in the use of instructional time; and able to vary their teaching strategies according to student needs. They are creative, encourage active student participation, make relevant assignments, arrange for plenty of successful engaged time, are skillful in using questions, promote both critical and creative thinking, and employ the use of wait-time when seeking student response. In addition, they provide feedback, monitor programs and

progress, use both traditional and alternative assessment procedures, and are fair in assessment and grading procedures. Finally, these teachers reflect on their practice and learn from their experiences, and they are members of learning communities, interested in continuing their own professional development.

Effective teachers also are described as caring (Cotton, 1995; Demmon-Berger, 1986; Educational Testing Service [ETS], 1997; Norton, 1997; Roueche, Baker, Mullin, & Boy, 1986; Wubbels et al., 1997). They are motivators who provide incentives through recognition and rewards, flexible in their abilities to be both dominant and cooperative, and empathetic yet in control. They have strong interpersonal skills, handle discipline through prevention, and they promote a classroom climate of respect and rapport that reflects their commitment to students and their learning.

Although the literature abounds with information regarding teacher effectiveness, the majority of these articles do not represent primary studies. Of the formal investigations undertaken in this area, most have examined actual characteristics of effective teachers or have asked inservice teachers and Educational theorists about their beliefs regarding effective teaching; that is, relatively few researchers have studied the *perceptions* of preservice teachers concerning the attributions of effective teachers. Moreover, most of the investigations have utilized qualitative techniques (e.g., interview) using small samples. A paucity of studies have incorporated qualitative and quantitative analyses within the same framework.

Recently, however, Witcher, Onwuegbuzie, and Minor (1999), using mixed-methodological approaches, found that preservice teachers' perceptions of effective teachers fell into the following six categories, in order of endorsement level: (1) student-centeredness (79.5%), (2) enthusiasm for teaching (40.2%), (3)

ethicalness (38.8%), (4) classroom and behavior management (33.3%), (5) teaching methodology (32.4%), and (6) knowledge of subject (31.5%). Additionally, these authors noted that females, college-level juniors, and minority students tended to endorse teacher characteristics that were associated with ethical behavior and teaching methodology to a greater extent than did their counterparts. Also, they tended to rate attributes that were associated with knowledge of subject and classroom and behavior management to a lesser degree.

Thus, the objective of the present inquiry was to replicate and to extend the work of Witcher et al. (1999). Specifically, the purpose of this study was to investigate what pre-service teachers view as important characteristics of effective teachers, with the intent of comparing their responses to descriptions provided in the literature. Also of interest was to investigate factors (e.g., Educational belief, gender, ethnicity, and year of study) that may have influenced their responses. It was hoped that findings from this study would help educators to determine the extent to which the perceptions of preservice teachers are similar to those of more experienced individuals.

Method

Participants

Participants were 134 preservice teachers who were enrolled in several sections of an introductory-level education class for education majors at a large university in South Georgia. The majority of the sample was female (78.4%) and White (72.4%). With regard to year of study, participants were either freshman (10.4%), sophomore (59.0%), junior (23.1%), senior (2.2%), or graduate (1.5%). Nearly all students (94.0%) were full-time students. Approximately one-half (i.e., 42.5%) of the preservice teachers intended to teach at the kindergarten and elementary school levels, with 34.3% expressing a desire to teach at the secondary

school level and the remainder (12.7%) wanting to teach at the middle school level. Approximately one-third (34.3%) of the participants preferred to teach in a public school in a rural area, with one-fourth (24.6%) wanting to teach in a public school in a suburban area and 20.1% expressing a desire to teach in an urban public school. The remainder preferred to teach at either a church-sponsored private school (12.7%) or at a non-denominational private school (5.2%). Using cut-off scores advocated by Witcher and Travers (1999), 28.4% of the participants were categorized as transmissive, 12.7% were classified as progressive, and 59.0% were deemed to be eclectic.

Instruments and Procedures

Participants were administered the Witcher-Travers Survey of Educational Beliefs (WTSEB) and the Preservice Teachers' Perceptions of Characteristics of Effective Teachers Survey (PTPCETS). The WTSEB, which was developed by Witcher-Travers (1999), contains two parts. Whereas the first part elicits demographic information (e.g., gender, age) from the respondents, the second section contains a 40-item Likert-type scale, with 5 possible responses ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree. The PTPCETS asks participants to identify, to rank, and to define between 3 and 6 characteristics that they believe effective teachers possess or demonstrate.

Analysis

A multi-stage qualitative-quantitative analysis (Onwuegbuzie, 2000) was undertaken to analyze the data. This form of analysis involved four stages. The first stage consisted of a phenomenological mode of inquiry (*inductive, generative, and constructive*) to examine the responses of students regarding their perceptions of characteristics of effective teachers (Goetz & Lecompte, 1984). In order to determine the percentage of students who cited each attribute, these data

were *unitized*; that is, units of information served as the basis for defining a significant statement (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Each unit corresponded to a unique characteristic (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

The *method of constant comparison* (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) was utilized in order to categorize units that appeared similar in content. Each category represented a distinct theme. This method of analysis revealed a number of themes relating to students' perceptions of characteristics of effective teachers.

The second stage of the analysis involved utilizing descriptive statistics to analyze the hierarchical structure of the emergent themes (Onwuegbuzie, 2000). In particular, each theme was *quantitized* (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 1998). Specifically, for each participant, a score of "1" was given for a theme if it represented at least one of the six stated characteristics; otherwise a score of "0" was given for that theme. That is, for each sample member, each theme was quantitized either to a "1" or a "0" depending on whether it was represented by that individual. Such quantitizing allowed the frequency of each theme to be calculated. From these frequencies, percentages were computed to determine the prevalence rates of each theme. These prevalent rates served as effect size measures (Onwuegbuzie, 2000).

The third stage of the analysis involved a series of chi-square analyses to determine which background variables were related to each of the themes. A Bonferroni adjustment was utilized to maintain the error rate at the 5% level of significance. The fourth and final stage involved an exploratory factor analysis to ascertain the underlying structure of these themes.

Results

Table 1 presents the themes that emerged from students' responses. It can be seen that the following seven themes surfaced from these responses: student-

centered, effective classroom and behavior manager, competent instructor, ethical, enthusiastic about teaching, knowledgeable about subject, and personable. Interestingly, student-centeredness was the most endorsed theme, with more than one-half of the sample citing one or more traits that fell into this category.

Insert Table 1 about here

A series of chi-square analyses, using the Bonferroni adjustment to control for Type I error ($p < .05$), indicated no relationship between the seven perception categories of effective teachers and preservice teachers' race, year of study, and preferred grade level for teaching. Similarly, no gender differences were found with respect to student-centered, competent instructor, ethical, enthusiastic about teaching, knowledgeable about subject, and personable. However, statistically significantly more males tended to endorse teacher characteristics that were associated with being an effective classroom and behavior manager than did females. Interestingly, a series of independent samples *t*-tests revealed no statistically significant difference between students' levels of Educational beliefs and each of the seven perception categories.

An exploratory factor analysis was used to determine the number of factors underlying the seven themes. Specifically, a maximum likelihood (ML) factor analysis was used with a varimax rotation. This technique, which gives better estimates than does principal factor analysis (Bickel & Doksum, 1977), is perhaps the most commonly used method of common factor analysis (Lawley & Maxwell, 1971). The ML factor analyses revealed a three-factor solution which explained 55.5% of the total variance. Loadings of items on each factor are presented in Table 2. Using a cutoff correlation of 0.3 recommended by Lambert and Durand (1975) as an

acceptable minimum loading value, it can be seen from this table that the following themes loaded significantly on the first factor: competent instructor, student-centered and effective classroom and behavior manager; the following themes loaded on the second factor: ethical and personable; and the following theme loaded on the third factor: enthusiastic about teaching and knowledgeable about subject. Clearly, the first factor can be labeled *instructional and management skills*. The second factor can be termed *ethical and well-tempered behavior*, whereas the third factor can be termed *knowledge and enthusiasm of/for subject and student*.

Insert Table 2 about here

Discussion

The purpose of the present study was to determine preservice teachers' perceptions about the characteristics of effective teachers, as well as to investigate factors that may have influenced their responses. A multi-stage qualitative-quantitative analysis (Onwuegbuzie, 2000) revealed that the perceptions held by preservice teachers represent a multidimensional construct. Specifically, perceptions were identified that led to the following seven themes: student-centered, effective classroom and behavior manager, competent instructor, ethical, enthusiastic about teaching, knowledgeable about subject, and personable.

Examples of student-centeredness include "love of students," "optimism," "supportive," "kind," "caring," and "patient"; descriptors of effective classroom and behavior management are "authoritative," "good disciplinarian," "leadership skills," and "alert"; examples of competent instructor are "creativity," open to new teaching styles," "clarity in teaching subject," and "ability to spark child's

interest"; words that describe ethical are "fairness," "honesty," and "trustworthy," "impartial," "dependable," and "reliable"; examples that characterize enthusiastic about teaching are "love of subject," "passion for teaching," "eager to teach," and "dedicated"; knowledgeable about subject include descriptors such as "efficiently teach and know material" and "knowledge of subject"; and examples of personable are "happy" and "easy going."

Student-centered descriptors received the greatest endorsement. Specifically, more than one-half of preservice teachers noted one or more characteristics representing this theme. This suggests that the current sample, in general, rated being student-centered as the most common characteristic of effective teachers. This is consistent with Witcher, Onwuegbuzie, et al. (1999), who found that this theme was endorsed by 79.5% of the sample. Thus, as noted by Witcher and Travers (1999), preservice teachers, in general, regard the *interpersonal context* as the most important aspect of teaching.

Effective classroom and behavior manager and competent instructor each were endorsed by one-third of the participants as being characteristic of effective teachers. Ethical was the next most common category--with slightly less than one-third of students subscribing to this characteristic. Approximately one-fourth of the sample rated characteristics pertaining to being enthusiastic about teaching. One-fifth of the preservice teachers cited traits relating to being knowledgeable about subject. Finally, personable was the theme that received the lowest endorsements--with only 15% of participants referring to characteristics in this area.

The seven themes, which loaded on three factors, dealt with instructional and management skills, ethical and well-tempered behavior, and knowledge and enthusiasm of/for subject and student. These factors suggest that the perceptions

of preservice teachers represent a complex phenomena. Interestingly, the themes that emerged from the preservice teachers' responses are more informative than the AASA's two-element conceptualization of effective teachers, namely, (a) management and instructional techniques and (b) personal characteristics (Demmon-Berger, 1986). The management and instructional techniques dimension of the AASA is similar to the instructional and management skills component that emerged in the present investigation. However, whereas the AASA conceptualize a personal characteristics element, the responses of the present sample suggest that this dimension could be broken down into (1) ethical and well-tempered behavior and (2) knowledge and enthusiasm of subject and student.

Interestingly, no relationship was found between the seven perception categories of effective teachers and preservice teachers' race, year of study, and preferred grade level for teaching. These findings indicate that members of the present sample were relatively homogeneous with respect to their perceptions. However, the fact that males tended to place more weight on being an effective classroom and behavior manager than did females suggests that issues pertaining to classroom discipline have a gender context. Thus, teacher-educators should be cognizant of possible gender differences when exposing their students to different discipline styles.

An extremely interesting finding was the fact that the Educational beliefs of only a minority (i.e., 12.7%) of preservice teachers could be classified as progressive. Progressive teachers also are referred to as being *modern* or *experiential*. According to Witcher and Travers (1999), this group of educators tends to view school as a social institution and seek to align school programming with contemporary needs in order to make education meaningful and relevant to the knowledge, abilities, and interests of their students. That is, these individuals

tend to base curricula upon their students' personal, familial, and social experiences with a goal of providing a continuous link between students' school-based learning and their lives outside the school context. As such, progressive teachers tend to regard their roles as that of facilitators, guides, or motivators (Witcher & Travers, 1999). Moreover, these teachers tend to present curricula holistically and in an open-ended manner in order to help students develop problem-solving skills. Using informal teaching techniques, students of progressive educators tend to engage in active learning, both independently and cooperatively, which focuses on solving learner-generated problems. Examples of progressive philosophies, theories, and tenets include constructivism, experimentalism, and naturalism (Witcher & Travers, 1999).

On the other hand, slightly more than one-fourth (28.4%) of the sample could be considered as having transmissive beliefs. Transmissive educators are often referred to as being *traditional* or *conservative*. This group of professionals views the needs of the community and student as essentially stable. As such, they are reluctant to revise, to modify, or to redesign the schooling process in any dramatic way. Transmissive teachers believe that the purpose of school is to develop the intellect. Thus, they view their role as one of dispensing important knowledge to students, and they prefer lecture, demonstration, and recitation as teaching methods. Teachers representing this paradigm tend to advocate curricula that are subject-centered, organized and sequenced, and focused on mastery of specific skills and content. Consequently, their classrooms tend to have a business-like atmosphere where students are passive learners who generally work independently. As noted by Witcher and Travers (1999), examples of transmissive philosophies, theories, and tenets include idealism, realism, perennialism, and essentialism.

A very high percentage of preservice teachers (59.0%) appeared to have eclectic Educational beliefs. Indeed, it is likely that this large number of eclectics attenuated the relationship between Educational beliefs and their perceptions of the characteristics of effective teachers. It is also likely that, as preservice teachers become more aware of various teaching philosophies through their Educational classes and their field experiences, many of these eclectics will emerge as either progressive or transmissive.

Future research should investigate how stable preservice teachers' perceptions and Educational beliefs are over time. Indeed, currently, the authors plan to track the attitudes and beliefs of the present sample throughout their preservice training, with the next measurement of attitudes taking place after they have completed their introductory-level education course. Such information should help to determine the impact that teacher training institutions have on Educational beliefs and perceptions.

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Table 1

Themes Emerging from Preservice Teachers' Perceptions of the Characteristics of Effective Teachers

Theme	Endorsement Rate (%)
Student-centered	55.2
Effective classroom and behavior manager	33.6
Competent instructor	33.6
Ethical	29.9
Enthusiastic about teaching	23.9
Knowledgeable about subject	19.4
Personable	15.7

Table 2:

Summary of Themes and Factor Loadings from Maximum Likelihood Varimax Factor Analysis: Three-Factor Solution

Theme	Factor Loading 1	2	3
Competent instructor	.75		
Student-centered	.59		
Effective classroom and behavior manager	.56		
Ethical		.84	
Personable		.71	
Enthusiastic about teaching			.78
Knowledgeable about subject			-.68

% of total variance accounted for by the solution = 55.5

Only loadings with large effect sizes are displayed, using a cut-off loading of 0.3 recommended by Lambert and Durand (1975).

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